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# 148-145 Republicans outline strategy to fight Yucca Mountain decision

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BLUFFTON TODAY COLUMBIA BUREAU

COLUMBIA — Republicans on Tuesday criticized the Obama Administration's decision to halt plans to make Yucca Mountain in Nevada a permanent nuclear waste storage facility, and outlined their legal and legislative counter attacks.

Gov. Mark Sanford threatened to take legal action against the federal government if the White House does not reverse its position by the end of the month. And Sen. Greg Ryberg, R-Aiken, said he plans to introduce legislation to divert payments flowing from the state's utility rate payers to the federal government so that South Carolina can create a fund for its own waste-storage purposes.

Yucca Mountain, located 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, has for nearly 30 years been the anticipated facility for securing and disposing of waste in tunnels on federally controlled land in the Mojave Desert. Waste that was destined for Yucca Mountain is being stored at 121 temporary locations in 39 states, including South Carolina.

At issue is what to do with all the waste if it is not headed to Yucca Mountain.

White House spokesman Adam Abrams said the administration opposed to the site from the beginning, but South Carolina Republicans on Tuesday said the White House's decision comes down to politics and efforts to protect a politically vulnerable lawmaker.

"As we move to expand nuclear power, the President is fully committed to ensuring that the nation meets our long term storage obligations for nuclear waste," said Abrams.

"That's why he has established a bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission ... to conduct

a comprehensive review of policies for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle, including all alternatives for the storage, processing, and disposal of civilian and defense used nuclear fuel and nuclear waste."

Ryberg said the administration's decision came down to politics.

"We have 30 years of science and probably millions of man hours and woman hours that have gone into the science of Yucca Mountain as a permanent depository," he said.

"We probably have 10 minutes in a poll that decided it wasn't good for the sitting (U.S. Senate) majority leader for Yucca Mountain to be pursued," said the lawmaker, referring to Democratic Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada.

But during a press conference Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said otherwise.

"I think what has taken Yucca Mountain off the table in terms of a long-term solution for a repository for our nuclear waste is the science," he said, according to a transcript.

"The science ought to make these decisions. The president has a panel headed by Lee Hamilton and Brent Scowcroft, two very able individuals, to help decide (waste storage)."

Meanwhile, Ryberg said his resolution will end any future payments toward a permanent repository for the federal government, directing part of the money to a new state fund "to pay for a different permanent storage solution that we must obviously find for ourselves."

Tuesday's Columbia press conference also included Republicans U.S. Reps. Joe Wilson of the 2nd congressional district and Graham Barrett of the 3rd district.

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